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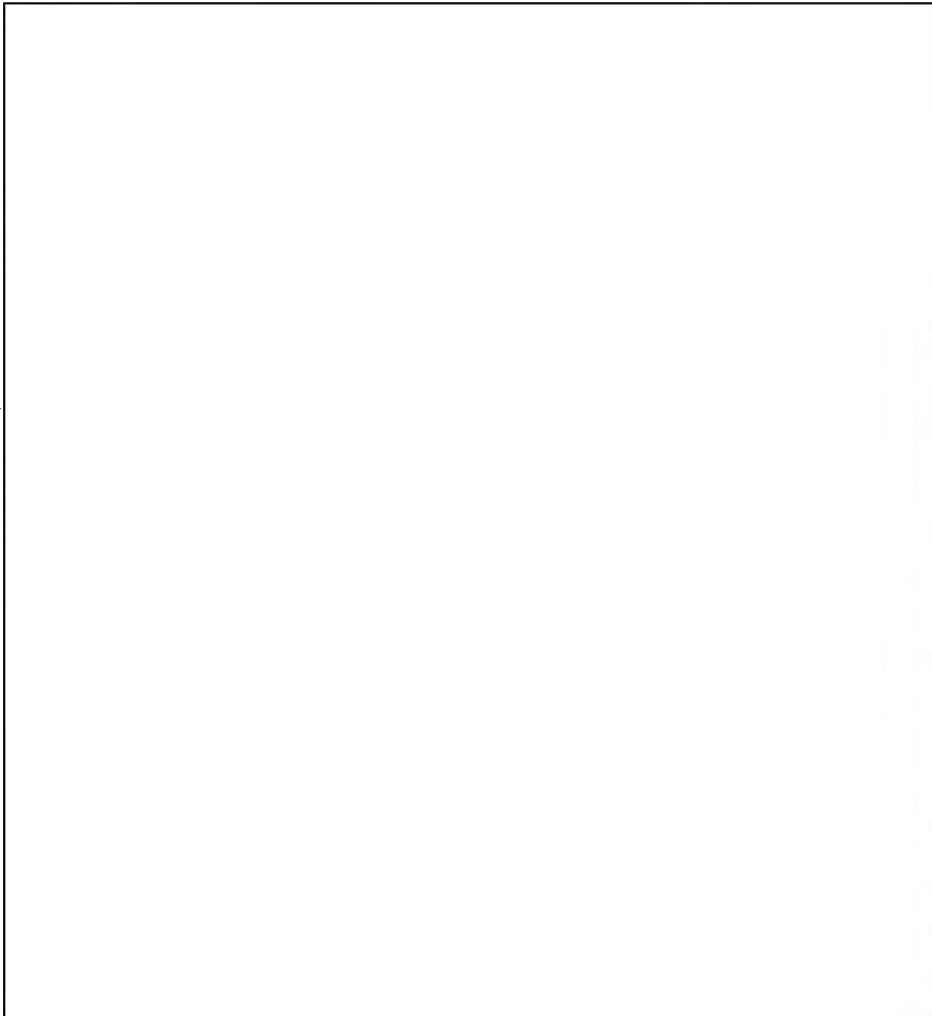
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 PM-US POWs, Bjt,980
 U.S. Claims Hundreds Of American POWs From Korea Were Taken To
USSR
 By ROBERT BURNS
 Associated Press Writer
    WASHINGTON (AP) _ The U.S. government says it has ``broad and
convincing'' evidence that the Soviet Union secretly and illegally
moved hundreds of U.S. Korean War prisoners to its territory in the
early 1950s and never released them.
    It is by far the most dramatic and comprehensive assertion by
Washington on a Soviet connection to missing U.S. servicemen since
the Korean fighting ended in 1953.
    The allegation was made in a detailed presentation by a senior
State Department official at a meeting with Russian officials in
Moscow earlier this month.
    The evidence is detailed in a 77-page report titled ``The
Transfer of U.S. Korean War POWs to the Soviet Union.'' It was
given to the Russians at the Moscow meeting but the Clinton
administration has refused to publicly release it.
    A copy of the report was obtained by The Associated Press.
    ``The Soviets transferred several hundred U.S. Korean War POWs
to the USSR and did not repatriate them,'' the report said. ``This
transfer was mainly politically motivated with the intent of
holding them as political hostages, subjects for intelligence
exploitation and skilled labor within the camp system.''
    It asserted that the evidence gave a ``consistent and mutually
reinforcing description'' of Soviet intelligence services forcibly
moving U.S. POWs to the USSR at a time when Soviet forces,
including anti-aircraft units, were active in North Korea.
    It did not assess how long the American servicemen _ mostly Air
Force aviators _ may have lived, or whether any might still be
alive in the former Soviet Union.
    Just last year the U.S. government said it had no evidence of
such transfers. Washington has known, though, since the end of the
war that some evidence existed that U.S. POWs from Korea had been
taken to the Soviet Union. It asked Moscow for information on this
in May 1954 and again in July 1956. Both times the Soviet
government denied any knowledge of U.S. POWs on its soil.
    Russian President Boris Yeltsin said last year that Soviet
records showed 59 captured U.S. servicemen in Korea were
interrogated by Soviet officials, and that 12 crew members of U.S.
aircraft shot down in reconnaissance missions unrelated to the
Korea war were transferred to Soviet territory. But the Yeltsin
government has yet to concede that Americans were taken from Korea.
    In the three years of fighting in Korea, in which the United
States led a U.N. force on the side of South Korea against
communist North Korea, 54,246 Americans were killed. The government
lists 8,140 as unaccounted for, although the number of missing for
which there is no direct evidence of death is estimated at 2,195.
Many of the ``unaccounted for'' were not recovered because they
were buried in battlefield graves in North Korea or died in POW

camps.

The U.S. report on U.S. Korean War prisoners taken to the Soviet Union gave no specific figure but the analysis seemed to indicate it is fewer than 600.

It identified by name 31 missing Air Force F-86 fighter pilots who are among the most likely identifiable servicemen to have been taken by the Soviets for their knowledge of the plane's capabilities, plus six other Air Force aviators about whom the U.S. government believes Russia has additional information.

The report describes a top-secret program of the Soviet MGB (predecessor to the KGB) to capture American fliers and other U.S. and allied troops in Korea, interrogate them, and then transfer them into Joseph Stalin's notorious Gulag system of slave labor camps in Siberia and other parts of the Soviet Union.

``The range of eyewitness testimony as to the presence of U.S. Korean War POWs in the Gulag is so broad and convincing that we cannot dismiss it,'' the report said, adding that the prisoners probably were forced to assume new identities.

Since the report was written, a retired Russian colonel has come forward and told investigators for the U.S.-Russian Joint Commission for POWs-MIAs that a man he saw twice at a Siberian prison in the mid-1960s was described to him by the prison commander as an American brought there from the Gulag system.

The Russian colonel, Vladimir Malinin, said the man in the prison bore a convincing resemblance to Marine Corps Sgt. Philip Vincent Mandra, who disappeared on the northern Korean battlefield in August 1952 after an encounter with Chinese troops. U.S. officials view Malinin's testimony as credible, though not conclusive, evidence that Mandra was in the Siberian prison.

The report given to the Russians this month is based on a variety of sources: U.S. government records dating to the beginning of the Korean conflict in 1950, documents made available by Moscow since the collapse of the Soviet Union, and recent interviews by U.S. investigators with former Soviet officials, including retired officers who said they participated in the transfers.

The report said the Soviet intelligence apparatus had gained extensive experience with using POWs in the Gulag during World War II, and that when Stalin ordered the invasion of South Korea in June 1950 it simply expanded the practice.

``By the middle of 1950, the Soviet Union had at hand a vast, well-practiced, efficiently operating and profitable system for the collection, incarceration and exploitation of POWs'' _ American, South Korean and others, it said.

One hub of the Soviet operation against allied POWs was Khabarovsk, in extreme southeastern Russia, the report said. Prisoners were taken there from Korea, interrogated by military intelligence agents and then shipped off to labor camps in the Soviet interior. It said at least one American was taken to Moscow.